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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: Jan. 11, 1977

Place: Van Buren Room

SUBJECT: Discussion of Human Rights Issue with Ambassador
Aja Espil and General Miro

PARTICIPANTS: Argentine Ambassador Aja Espil
Major General Luis María Miró, Arg. Mil. Attache
Major General Cavazos, DOD/ISA
Deputy Assistant Secretary Bray, ARA
Robert W. Zimmermann, ARA/ECA

CC: INR-Mr. Buchanan AmEmbBuenos Aires-Amb. Hill
INR/OIL/B
ARA/ECA/Argentina

Deputy Assistant Secretary Charles Bray invited Ambassador Jorge Antonio Aja Espil and Major General Luis María Miró, Argentine Military Attache, to lunch January 11 for the purpose of discussing the human rights issue. The presence of Miró was of particular interest in view of his high standing in the Argentine military hierarchy and his imminent return to Argentina (February).

To initiate the discussion, the visitors were asked whether they were aware of any reaction by the GOA to the report on Argentina submitted to Congressman Fraser. Both responded in the negative and suggested that this was perhaps a favorable sign. They further volunteered that the report seemed balanced but expressed their annoyance with press treatment here.

Remarking that the luncheon "broke protocol", in a sense, in that the Ambassador had not yet presented his credentials and that civilians and military were mixed, whereas the tendency was to exchange views only with their own kind. Bray described in depth the trauma through which the United States had passed, beginning with the assassination of President Kennedy and including the general turmoil of the late sixties and early seventies, and ending with the reversion of the country to a more traditional middle class morality that is related to the stand being taken today by Congress, Church groups and many citizens in general on human rights. In specific response to

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earlier professions by both guests that they considered the human rights uproar to be the work of a "few small groups", they were firmly disabused. It was pointed out that almost any provision regarding human rights in a bill that reaches a floor vote on the Hill can command two-thirds of the votes. Whether this is just or not really begs the question. The important point is that this is the perception of the American people and a fact that must be dealt with in our bilateral relations.

Emphasizing our full understanding of the predicament in which the GOA finds itself, Bray underscored the importance of avoiding a separation of our two countries. It is in the US interest that we remain together and we assume that that is the aim of Argentina as well. We are doing everything possible to avoid a separation but in view of the general US perception of the human rights situation in Argentina, we need evidence of change. It was pointed out that Fraser will hold hearings in February, the Harkin amendment remains in the fore and no final determination has been made regarding security assistance for FY 77. We need Argentina's assistance so that we can keep things on an even keel. For example it would be helpful if the GOA would release lists of those detained and punish right wing violators of human rights. We recognize that some lists of those released have been issued and this was helpful, but after all, these were the ones released.

Miró said that he had been advised that morning that the US had agreed to the use of almost \$8 million in FY 76 FMS credits for the purchase of spare parts and this had indeed been helpful. Aja Espil remarked that security assistance and general financial help were the two most important items for which Argentina looks to the United States. Bray took the occasion to point out that the approval of the \$8 million for spares was difficult for us to do; there was considerable opposition in some quarters and it was not at all clear that we could do this sort of thing again.

Miró, a strong advocate of the international communist conspiracy approach, then sought to place the Argentine terrorist campaign into a hemisphere context. The way to bring down the United States, he asserted, was through Latin America. If terrorist groups were able to take over a significant country and extended their dominance in the region, there would be no way to stop them. The US and then Western civilization would be lost. And the attack is now being launched in Argentina and others will follow - perhaps Peru.

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Returning to the human rights issue, General Cavazos, on a soldier to soldier basis, reaffirmed our understanding of Argentina's plight. The problem, he said, is that we must fight the forces of terrorism with one hand tied behind our back. By way of illustrating his point he referred to a particularly vicious battle in Viet-Nam in which the unit he commanded was victorious. After all was over, one of the young heroes of the fray went out on the field and cut off the ears of several dead Viet-Cong soldiers. While this act was hardly of great import to the dead men it was a clear violation of the rules of war and he, Cavazos, had the man courtmartialled. While Miró listened attentively, he did not comment.

Comment: While the conversation was entirely friendly, it was not immediately clear how the guests would report this conversation to Buenos Aires. There was little overt sign that their basic appreciation of the problem was significantly altered or that their sense of urgency was jogged. Clearly they are concerned about the forthcoming hearings on the Hill, the Harkin amendment and the future of military assistance but whether this concern would be translated into appropriate messages to Buenos Aires was a moot point. Aja Espil said little of substance -- perhaps intimidated by the presence of General Miró -- and the latter gave away nothing.

That there was a reaction was evident the following day. General Cavazos telephoned General Miró the next morning to be sure that Miró had focused on the bottom line and discovered that Miró had already telephoned General Viola in Buenos Aires to relate details of the conversation. Cavazos emphasized the need for the GOA to understand the necessity to help us in our efforts to keep the two countries together and that two of the most important steps to this end were to punish egregious offenders of human rights and to publish a list of those being detained. Miró said he understood and would make certain that Viola appreciated these points.

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